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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/10/2018

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: THIRTY-TWO MEMBERS OF MALADY FRONT DETAINED BY  
POLICE

REF: MINSK 132

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reason 1.4 (d).

11. (C) Thirty-two members of the youth NGO "Malady Front" were detained by police March 9 while holding an organizational meeting at the Minsk office of the Congress of Democratic Trade Unions. Katya Galitskaya, external relations coordinator for the group, told Pol/Econ Chief that "Malady Front" was holding a planning meeting when police arrived, purportedly responding to complaints from neighbors who claimed that MF members were throwing paper from the windows. All but one were released less than three hours later following an ID check at the Leninskiy Rayon police station near downtown Minsk. The final activist detained, Artem Dubskiy, was released a short time later following questioning by investigators on his participation in entrepreneurs demonstrations earlier this year. No charges were filed.

Activists Grateful for Embassy Involvement  
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12. (C) Former political prisoner Artur Finkevich, Deputy Head of "Malady Front" thanked Pol/Econ Chief both for the USG's principled position on democracy and human rights in Belarus and for coming to the police station to inquire about the whereabouts of the detained. He noted that "Malady Front" activist Katya Solovyova faced trial in a Vitebsk court soon on charges of participation in an unregistered organization (Article 193 of the Criminal Code). Finkevich promised to inform the Embassy of the date of the trial and urged the Embassy to send a diplomat to observe it.

Comment  
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13. (C) This was the second incident of mass detentions at a peaceful, private "Malady Front" meeting in less than one month (reftel), and is evidence that regime harassment of opposition civil society activity shows no signs of abating. The coming trials of Katya Solovyova -- whose activism has already led to her expulsion from Polotsk State University -- and others will be important tests of the authorities' commitment not to replace recently freed political prisoners with new ones. Sadly, there is every indication that these are tests the authorities could fail.  
STEWART